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# Inside APHIS

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## Solomon's Island Group Envisions the Agency in 2005

By Sue Wilkinson, Public Affairs, LPA

Come with me on a journey of the imagination inside the collective brain of APHIS. It's a pretty amazing place. I had the privilege of taking this journey by joining 80 or so APHIS employees who met January 30 through February 2 in Solomon's Island, MD, to create a vision for the future. The combined brainpower of this group propelled us into the world of APHIS in the 21st century. And I can tell you, we found some pretty heady stuff there.

In the collective APHIS brain, we found a place where veterinarians tackle plant pest problems. We found a place where wildlife damage control specialists help fight devastating livestock diseases. We saw regulatory analysts answering calls from the media and Capitol Hill. We saw biotechnologists sitting down at negotiating tables with representatives from foreign governments. We saw budget personnel assisting training specialists and vice versa.

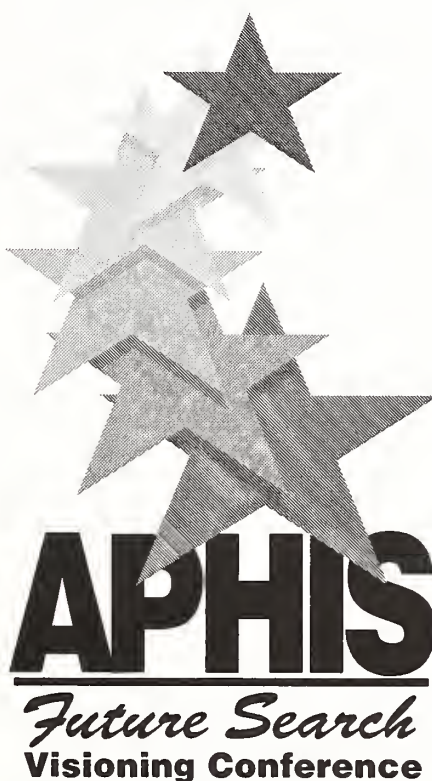
At a wonderful stop along our trip, we saw a diverse workforce receiving critical training to broaden their skills. We saw progressive leaders empowering their employees to take initiative and get the job done. We saw

fulfilled and inspired employees carefully balancing their personal and work responsibilities and their supervisors actively encouraging the effort.

At a rather dark and harrowing juncture, we saw diminishing resources. But we soon saw this situation as a wonderful challenge—an opportunity to pull together and show the world what a motivated team can accomplish.

As a result, we saw people helping their coworkers in a united effort to fulfill an ever-expanding mission. We saw satisfied customers thanking the APHIS leadership for excellent service. We saw APHIS employees sitting down at tables with environmental groups and grower organizations, with animal welfare proponents and medical researchers. We saw grateful stakeholders appreciating our efforts to work cooperatively with them.

After completing this journey, your colleagues and I were energized and uplifted. To know more about how our imaginations took us to this wonderful, busy world of APHIS in the year 2005 and beyond, turn the pages of this special edition of *Inside APHIS*. It will explain how we got there. And more importantly, how we're all going to get there. ♦



★ We bring food to your table, stimulate global economies, and protect and enhance ecosystems. We are a highly motivated and capable team of diverse individuals who share leadership within an agency community that cares about our professional and personal lives.

—from the APHIS Vision Statement



# So What Is a Future Search Conference Anyway?

By Sue Wilkinson, Public Affairs, LPA



"I came home exhausted," said Tolani Francisco, VS (left), "but after I digested the material, I realized we had really accomplished a lot. My colleagues were pleased to have a representative from our region (New Mexico)." Also from left, Elly Cleaver, VS; Kevin Walker, VS; Gary Larson, ADC; and Joe Anelli, VS. APHIS photo by Kevin Conner.

On the cutting edge of management processes, future search conferences allow managers to plan comprehensively, empower employees, and look at organizational plans from both internal and external viewpoints to achieve a high degree of buy-in. To date, few public sector organizations have engaged in future search conferences. The APHIS conference was the second in USDA; PPQ held the first in 1994. Observers from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the Federal Quality Institute attended the APHIS conference to study the methodology for possible use in other organizations.

During the APHIS Future Search Visioning Conference, the roughly 80 participants, the APHIS Management Team (AMT), and the conference facilitators and support staff met almost nonstop—mornings, afternoons, and evenings. The sessions were alternately exhausting and energizing, frustrating and inspiring.

The conference opened Monday night. Acting Administrator Lonnie King and Pat Jensen, acting assistant secretary for marketing and regulatory programs, welcomed the participants and set the tone for the meeting. Afterward, the participants got to know each other. By program area, they presented skits to depict each program's culture. For example, the APHIS trainers (R&D)

chugged into the room saying, "We think we can. We think we can . . ."

On Tuesday, the participants were divided into 12 groups that cut across organizational lines. Each participant had brought to the conference a symbol that represented to that person the most significant change that had occurred in APHIS in the last 10 years. Each group then presented their favorite symbol to the entire conference. Many groups presented symbols that represented changes in technology; fax machines and electronic mail have become important parts of the APHIS culture. King discussed the AMT's expectations for the conference (excerpts from his remarks are printed elsewhere in this publication). He also explained the AMT's role in the conference: The AMT would participate as individuals and, as a body, would endorse the final vision statement.

Speakers from many APHIS stakeholder groups made presentations on their expectations for APHIS in the next century (their thoughts are presented in a separate article). Next, the participants witnessed a "town hall meeting" of APHIS customers, thanks to PPD and many other employees. The meeting included producers, importers, environmentalists, and animal welfare advocates, among others. The skit and stakeholder presentations served to remind the

conference participants that APHIS serves a diverse, demanding, and ever-expanding customer base and that we need to keep the voice of our customers in mind in crafting our future vision.

The participants then plastered a paper-covered wall with important events that occurred both in and outside of APHIS during the

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last 10 years. This exercise helped the group focus on where the agency has been to help us see where we should be going. The participants used this information to help select societal trends and current issues important to APHIS' future. The conference facilitators plotted the group's input on a huge "mind map." The participants then voted individually on what they believed were the five most significant issues or trends facing APHIS.

For the final event of day one, the participants reunited with their program colleagues and came up with lists of "prouds and sorries." Each program group then presented to the rest of the conference three accomplishments of which they were most proud and three things that they wished they could improve. Many of the programs reported being proud of their employees' dedication, and many groups were sorry that, despite past efforts, APHIS has still failed to become a unified agency.

### **APHIS, This Is Your Life!**

On Wednesday, King used the information from the mind map to formulate what he thought were the most important issues facing APHIS. He neatly placed 13 separate issues into 3 large categories: What is the APHIS mission? How do we accomplish that mission? And who composes the APHIS workforce? The conference participants generally agreed with his synopsis and formed groups to work on the issue items. After some consideration, 2 similar issues were merged for a final total of 12.

The drafting of the vision statement had begun. Each group prepared a short statement to describe how, looking back 10 years from now, APHIS should

have responded to that group's issue. The groups presented their statements, and then each participant had the opportunity to comment on each statement. The groups considered all of the comments received and then fine-tuned their statements. Many volunteers worked late into the night to come up with statements that would help tie the 12 separate statements together. These participants came up with three statements that answered King's what, how, and who questions.

### **Flies on the Wall**

On the final day, the participants discussed the first draft of the vision statement that had been completed the night before. They were then treated to the unusual opportunity of eavesdropping on an AMT meeting. The AMT sat in the middle of the conference room and discussed the vision statement, and the rest of us got to listen in and see our leadership in action. The participants then formed a vision crafting team to finalize the document in light of the comments that had emerged that day. They also devised ways of communicating the vision search process to all of their colleagues who were not at the conference. Thus, this special edition of *Inside APHIS*.

The vision crafting team met 1 week after the conference ended and came up with a final draft of the vision statement. This statement was presented to the AMT for endorsement on February 12 and mailed to all APHIS employees on February 24.

### **What's Next?**

The visioning conference was only the first step of the future search process. During the first week of May 1995, APHIS will convene a second conference at the new headquarters facility in

Riverdale, MD. The purpose of this conference will be to develop strategies for implementing the vision. While the conference will develop broad organizational strategies, a major element of this process will be to encourage all employees to devise strategies to help make the vision a reality within their own realms. Therefore, the conference participants will be looking for ways to fully engage everyone in APHIS to participate actively in realizing the vision. An advisory team of individuals who attended the first conference will help select attendees for the second conference. Attendees will be selected based on their knowledge of the elements in the vision statement and ability to help implement them.

Congratulations to those of you who attended the visioning conference and best wishes to those of you selected to attend the implementation conference. You have a critical and exciting task ahead. The product of your conference will be a galvanizing force that helps move APHIS into the next century. With your help, the APHIS leadership will guide an inspired and prepared workforce in the right direction. ♦

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### **We Want Your Comments on the Vision Statement!**

All APHIS employees should have received a copy of the complete APHIS vision statement and accompanying documents. If you did not receive this packet, contact your office administrator. All comments on the vision statement should be submitted to Matina Sawicki by March 31. Her address is APHIS, Policy and Program Development, Evaluation Services, 4700 River Road, Unit 120, Riverdale, MD 20737-1228. Her FAX number is (301) 734-5899.

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We promote the health of animal and plant resources, we provide technical trade facilitation in a global marketplace, and we ensure an abundant food and fiber supply for the U.S. consumer, while considering society's demands for enhancing ecosystems and animal well-being.



# King Asks Employees for Courage to Transform the Agency

*(The following text is from remarks by Acting Administrator Lonnie J. King at the Future Search Visioning Conference in Solomon's Island, MD, January 31, 1995.)*

The Future Search Conference will help us examine and clarify APHIS' past and present; yet at the same time, create a future and implementation strategies to achieve that tomorrow. We must have the courage and imaginations to make future demands as compelling as our current reality. We must be responsive to a world in rapid motion. . . . While our heritage has been noble and admirable, our future unfortunately is no longer just an extension of the past.

This conference is . . . about turning the mirror inward and looking with new eyes at our view of APHIS, agriculture, and the world. We need to bring the experiences and assumptions that are the basis of our culture to the surface and hold them to rigorous scrutiny as we begin our future search. The search conference is about how cultures may need to be transformed. To start this process, the first step is to become "unfrozen" from the past and present. You will need to suspend past beliefs and then consider the

debate taking place about government's role and purpose that includes activists on one side and minimalists on the other. Interestingly, both sides advocate a smaller government that regulates much less. Unfortunately, the debate will focus only on "less" and not "better." The public's distrust and discontent is driving this revolution; a safe, predictable, and comfortable future for government workers and programs is a relic of the past. This is not a time to sit back and wait for the environment to move backwards, to blame others, or to become a cynical victim; if we wait for new road signs and a safe pathway, we will be disappointed. Our future is about claiming our freedom and creating an APHIS of our choosing.

APHIS should . . . build maps to the future based on envisioning and working backwards. In other words, we must start with the end in sight. Defining, understanding, and setting standards based on a customer focus are critical as is the effort for defining success based on program results and outcomes.

not be centered around what we know, but rather, in what we do with what we know.

What is our mission? Is it still the right mission? As a public enterprise, APHIS doesn't have the authorization to change our mission; however, our mission is very broad with the latitude and ability to redirect as customer needs emerge. . . . We truly face a quiltwork of social, economic, political, and scientific issues. A complex collage of people, behaviors, expectations, and activities form the framework of internal and external customers that want more and better services at less cost and demand improved responsiveness and communications.

Old paradigms are entrenched with authority, responsibility, efficiency, and control. The new paradigm should be replete with customers, service, quality, value, flexibility, innovation, empowerment, and continuous improvement. Many of the problems we face or are about to face are not because of the much-maligned federal workers but because of the



**We accomplish our mission with progressive, shared leadership that is coalition based and driven by state-of-the-art technology and analysis, scientific information, and innovative regulatory systems. We effectively communicate with our customers and strategically market the success of our programs.**

background and data you have heard and accept the need to change.

One of the most critical management skills during turbulent times is anticipation. . . . Most organizations spend the bulk of their time . . . responding to problems and crises. However, it is critical for tomorrow to anticipate opportunity and prevent problems from occurring.

The next 2 years will be the most difficult in our history. There is a

One of our primary limitations today is in how we organize work. We will transition into more cross-functional and multidisciplinary teams with a new focus on outcomes and impacts of our programs and activities. Fluid, seamless organizations may be the norm where segmentation and specialization are replaced by small, multiskilled teams that take ownership for entire processes and where roles are less distinct and also more fluid. How we work will

mindset of the past paradigms and the systems in which they are embedded. Poor outcomes are due partly to the effort of individuals competently carrying out their assigned duties. This conference is about changing those duties.

Today, we enter an era where there are more new management techniques than at any time in the last 50 years; an era where the public and Congress is fed up with the lack of results of government programs, where the federal budget



APHIS' organizational capacity is used to fulfill its mission by bringing together a diverse community of team-oriented professionals who represent or have access to the best scientific and technological expertise and tools.



APHIS PHOTO BY KEVIN CONNER

"I thought it sounded like we were going to protect the planet and feed the world—a great vision in anyone's estimation," says M&B's Clarence Lemon, second from left. "We had a bunch of visionary people. If we stick with our vision and make it work, we'll look good going into the 21st century." Also pictured (from left) are Pete Butchko, ADC; Stanley Freihofer, National Association of Agriculture Employees, and Sharon Coursey, R&D.

is out of control, and an era where agriculture sits on the edge of the most dramatic changes perhaps in its history. Profound change is now about setting our direction and strategy for survival. While this is a real, sobering experience, it also represents a time for unprecedented opportunity.

Reform can bloom into multiple, unconnected pieces and directions. There has to be proper linkages of strategies and alignment of our

actions to ensure a clear sense of purpose. Part of our job during this conference is to help clarify our direction, define new strategies, and connect the dots by focusing on common themes. We must develop the skills to manage change. We must never underestimate the human costs of this process. Negative emotions are inevitable; trust is hardest to establish when you truly need it most.

The APHIS Management Team has invited you here . . . to help create the future through determining the right focus and direction.

What do we want? We want your ideas and capacity to grasp the future and not cling to the past. We must finalize a shared vision that creates a commonality that gives us a sense of purpose and coherence to all activities that APHIS carries out. The AMT is committed to endorsing this vision and to implementing changes and strategies that will enable all of us to realize this future. ♦



# Stakeholders Add Their Perspectives to Future Search Vision

By Kim Taylor, Executive Correspondence, LPA

"There were light bulbs going on all over the place!" In Howard Singletary's view, the highly charged, collaborative atmosphere and free-flowing exchange of ideas were just some of the many high points of the Future Search Visioning Conference held at Solomon's Island. Singletary, representing the National Plant Board, was one of 10 APHIS stakeholders who contributed their time and unique perspectives to the conference. The stakeholders worked shoulder-to-shoulder with APHIS field and headquarters personnel in the 3-day visioning effort, carving out the specifics of what they—and the rest of the conference's 80-odd participants—believed the future holds for APHIS and the agricultural community as a whole. Such inclusive planning efforts are mandated under the Government Performance and Results Act, which directs Federal agencies to use strategic planning tools to map out their futures and, by doing so, become more results-oriented—tailoring their services as necessary to meet the public's ever-shifting demands.

## Customer-Driven Changes

Change, and how APHIS prepares for it, was an overriding concern of many stakeholders as well. As Singletary put it, "APHIS' role is evolving from a regulatory to a more customer-driven orientation." In this innovative, forward-looking climate, Singletary predicted that we'll see less and less of a "no, it's not possible" and much more of a "yes, it can be done" attitude toward problem-solving and decisionmaking.

Wes Towers of the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) echoed the merits of this can-do attitude, expressing his

belief that organizations like USAHA will continue to expand the scope of their working relationships with APHIS. "I see USAHA continuing to act as a bridge between APHIS and State cooperators, commodity groups, and special interests—and helping to get the message out to others, including those out on the farm, that the agency is truly committed to changing its way of doing business," said Towers. As he indicated, this linking role will increase in importance as the agency moves more toward preventive approaches to address pest and disease threats that lay beyond our borders and as global markets continue to expand.

## Industry-Operated Programs

Both Towers and Singletary saw active stakeholder participation in the development and implementation of pest and disease management strategies as crucial factors to the ultimate success of future APHIS programs. This participation will likely extend to the development of more industry-operated quality assurance programs, which, in Towers' view, would more appropriately put APHIS in the role of steerer, not rower. "In the future, these types of activities will be best administered by the end users—the people exporting and importing breeding stock and germplasm and the research laboratories, for example—with oversight by APHIS," he said.

While a reality today, diminishing resources and increasing public interest in environmental quality and animal welfare issues will also undoubtedly continue to play prominent roles in APHIS' tomorrow. Many stakeholders voiced the opinion that only

adaptable, multidisciplinary organizations with consolidated administrative functions would respond successfully to fiscal and other challenges. Singletary cited APHIS' current collocation efforts as proactive ways to address such concerns; one move has placed the agency's North Carolina State Plant Health Director's office under the same roof as the North Carolina Department of Agriculture's Division of Plant Industry. "We need to maximize our resources for the taxpayer's benefit," Singletary said. "Sharing space and pooling the talents of our employees will enable us to work better together and build much-needed consensus."

## Need to Inform the Public

Another critical area for the APHIS of tomorrow will be meeting the educational challenge. "We will need to inform people more about what we do. In the future, we are going to be dealing with decreasing levels of understanding among the public about agriculture," Singletary added. Faith Campbell, government liaison with the Exotic Pest Plant Council, concurred with this view, stating in her speech to conference attendees that APHIS' importance in protecting our agricultural resources is not generally recognized by the public. Campbell saw this as our most central problem in preparing for the future. She also stressed the importance of expanding inspection activities to cover additional pathways—such as seed shipments, dunnage, first-class mail, and, to a lesser extent, increasing numbers of international travelers—that could be potential avenues for noxious weeds and destructive pests and diseases to enter this country. As Campbell stated, "APHIS needs to



Employees and management collaboratively address all activities as a continual learning process on an individual and organizational level.



perform an intimidating balancing act—facilitating free trade while fulfilling its obligation to prohibit the entry of destructive organisms and protect agricultural resources and the environment.”

### Staying Ahead of the Curve

Emerging socioethical beliefs will also have a profound impact on the future direction of APHIS and the agricultural community in general. In his discussion of the ethical implications involved in animal welfare issues, Bernard Rollin, professor and director of bioethical planning at Colorado State University, said that, while APHIS is doing a good job with regard to many laboratory animals, “we must also know what is going on in society and stay ahead of the curve.” Rollin maintains that the public’s definition of animal suffering has changed over the years and that farm animal welfare will be the next major issue in the spotlight. In addition, the inclusion of rats, mice, and birds under the Animal Welfare Act and humane issues regarding animals produced through genetic engineering will receive much attention. In his concluding remarks, Rollin cautioned that the “best way to deal with animal welfare issues is to do the right—the ethical—thing.”

### Complex Future

As you can see, the challenges laid before conference participants in determining APHIS’ future were many and complex. However, with the wide-ranging, constructive input provided by our partners and stakeholders, we are bound to redefine our role in ways that prepare us to meet—and surpass—all expectations. ♦



APHIS PHOTO BY KEVIN CONNER

“I’m heartened to be part of an organization that is very visionary,” says Charlotte Travieso. “I liked the process of taking the past and present and using them as building blocks to help determine our future. I especially liked the stakeholder participation so we could see how APHIS fits in the world.” Also pictured from left are Kevin Shea, Phyllis York, and Joanne Munno, all from M&B.



APHIS PHOTO BY KEVIN CONNER

PPQ participants enjoying future search discussion are (from left) Tom Chanelli, Mary Negron, Phil Garcia, and Jim Reynolds.

We forge partnerships both within and outside APHIS.  
The agency provides a nurturing environment for  
balancing professional and personal responsibilities.



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